

Dr. Ross Hastings
Dean, FGPS

We are writing to request that you permit Mr. Nicholas Ali to defend his thesis despite having two examiners giving grades of three on their evaluations of his resubmitted thesis. This request is in spite of the statement to the reviewers that **“If more than one examiner chooses this verdict for the revised thesis, the student must withdraw from the program.”**

Our reasons for this request are based on several factors. The first one concerns the fact that since the thesis was submitted to the examiners we have received notices from two peer-reviewed journals (Knee & Computer Methods in Biomechanics and Biomedical Engineering) that two more chapters in the thesis have been accepted for publication (see attachments for confirmation). This despite the remarks by two internal reviewers that they doubted that the chapters were publishable because of their non-appreciable scientific merit. We realize this causes a dilemma. Two of the main goals of the university are the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Peer-reviewed publications are one of the principal means of evaluating whether or not a professor, department or the university accomplishes these goals. Obviously, it should also be a means of evaluating a graduate student. We also use this measure to distribute scholarships and awards to students. Mr. Ali's article-format thesis consisting of five chapters that were to be submitted for publication, now has been successful with four of his five article chapters. The fifth (fourth in the series) is still under review by a journal, since it was only recently submitted. It is our (both supervisor's and co-advisor's) firm belief that this final paper will also be accepted and published in a well-reputed Biomechanics related journal. Thus, by our usual measure of academic status, Mr. Ali passes with flying colours. You might want to find out how many successful PhD defences have met or exceeded this standard. We believe many have not and yet have received their doctoral degrees.

We, of course, recognize that a thesis consisting of any number of published papers does not in and of itself justify the awarding of a doctorate. A doctorate consists of more than a collection of peer-reviewed papers. The papers should meet other standards such as they should be primarily created by the doctoral student and be the results of studies as outlined during a formal thesis proposal. They should not just be a miscellany of projects resulting from doing research under the direction of a supervisor or in collaboration with colleagues. The research presented in Mr. Ali's dissertation were devised by him in consultation with his thesis proposal committee, the data were collected exclusively by him, analyzed by him, and the papers and dissertation were written by him with minimal assistance from his supervisors. Frankly, neither of his supervisors are experts in musculoskeletal modelling, which was the subject of the final and most important chapter (now accepted for publication in Computer Methods in Biomechanics and Biomedical Engineering (CMBBM), a well-reputed journal in Biomechanics). In fact, Mr. Ali travelled to Denmark to work with experts in this field and stayed for two weeks (with minimal funding) to train on how to use their software called The Anybody Modeling System (<http://www.anybodytech.com/>). You will notice that the authors (both professors at Aalborg University, Denmark) of this product agreed to have their names included on his final article chapter—further external confirmation of the scientific merit of his research. It should be added that one of the co-authors of the paper in CMBBM (Prof. J. Rasmussen) is the main founder of the Anybody Modeling system, and is a world-known research in Biomechanics.

Unfortunately, some of the examiners (especially those from the SHK) underestimated Mr. Ali's work and were very confident, as can be found in their comments on the thesis merit, that the chapters won't be accepted for publication. We wonder whether their reviews and grades would have been different with this knowledge. Of course, it not always possible to have all the such facts available at the time that a thesis is submitted. Regardless, both his co-supervisors strongly believe that he is capable and deserving of defending a thesis that was well conceived, expedited, and of a standard high enough for a doctoral candidate. The latter confirmed by the creation and dissemination of new knowledge.

One concern may be that this "violation" of the rules will set an inappropriate precedent that could negate the thesis review process. This should NOT be considered a precedent. It is an exception to a rule. Frankly, a rule that we believe is ill conceived. The form sent to the examiners for a revised thesis is problematic. What the form is seeking is whether the student should pass or fail his dissertation. By offering four categories one of which depends on anticipating what another committee member might do is inappropriate. The examiners should simply decide: is the thesis acceptable for defence or does the student fail? How is it reasonable for an examiner to request revisions when no revisions are possible if one other examiner asks for revisions? If two professors request revisions the students fails and neither professor's request is met. What about, in Mr. Ali's case, the judgments of the other examiners that the thesis be defended? Their wishes are equally precluded. Not to mention the student, who after five years of work and successfully meeting the usual standards of the university (i.e., peer-reviewed publications) is left with no doctoral degree.

In summary, Mr. Ali deserves the right to defend his research at a formal thesis defence. We don't believe that any of the examiners in their responses actually wanted Mr Ali to fail. Indeed, we believe the form used to potentially deny him a defence is the cause of this current dilemma. We respectfully, request that you permit that his defence to go forward and allow Mr. Ali the dignity of a public defence where he can present his important work that he has spent the last five years of his life on.

Sincerely,

D. Gordon E. Robertson, PhD
Emeritus Professor, University of Ottawa
Fellow, Canadian Society for Biomechanics

Gholamreza Rouhi
Assistant Professor, Amirkabir University of Technology, Iran